

The VICE PRESIDENT. The President of the Senate, at the direction of that body, appoints the following Senators as members of the committee on the part of the Senate to escort Her Excellency Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of the Republic of Latvia, into the House Chamber:

The Senator from Tennessee (Mr. FRIST);

The Senator from Kentucky (Mr. McCONNELL);

The Senator from Alaska (Mr. STEVENS);

The Senator from Arizona (Mr. KYL);

The Senator from Mississippi (Mr. LOTT);

The Senator from Illinois (Mr. DURBIN); and

The Senator from California (Mrs. BOXER).

The Assistant to the Sergeant at Arms announced the Acting Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, His Excellency Banny De Brum, Ambassador of the Marshall Islands.

The Acting Dean of the Diplomatic Corps entered the Hall of the House of Representatives and took the seat reserved for him.

At 11 o'clock and 4 minutes a.m., the Assistant to the Sergeant at Arms announced Her Excellency Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of the Republic of Latvia.

The President of the Republic of Latvia, escorted by the committee of Senators and Representatives, entered the Hall of the House of Representatives and stood at the Clerk's desk.

[Applause, the Members rising.]

The SPEAKER. Members of the Congress, it is my great privilege and I deem it a high honor and a personal pleasure to present to you Her Excellency Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of the Republic of Latvia.

[Applause, the Members rising.]

ADDRESS BY HER EXCELLENCY DR. VAIRA VIKE-FREIBERGA, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA

President VIKE-FREIBERGA. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, distinguished Members of the House of Representatives, honorable Senators, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, it is with deep emotion that I stand within these august walls and thank you for the honor of addressing you on behalf of the Latvian people.

I believe this honor to be bestowed upon me in recognition of Latvia's strivings, sacrifices and extraordinary success in transforming itself from a captive nation under the yoke of a foreign totalitarian regime into a reestablished democracy with a flourishing market economy.

Fifteen years ago, Latvia, along with neighboring Estonia and Lithuania, regained its independence after 50 years of Soviet occupation. The Baltic Singing Revolution achieved this by non-violent means and the sheer courage and determination of the peoples of

these countries. They were ready to face Soviet guns and tanks with nothing but their unarmed bodies and the deep conviction of their rights, knowing full well that, at any moment, these guns and tanks might crush them as they had crushed so many before.

After the collapse of the once powerful Soviet empire, Latvians at long last recovered their fundamental rights and freedoms. They regained the right to forge their own destiny; they recovered the freedom to shape their own future.

For too long the Iron Curtain had kept Europe divided and the nations of the world confronted each other in two opposing camps. We thank the Lord that these times are behind us at last. Dozens of nations have gained or regained their sovereignty. For them, right has triumphed over might, courage has overcome fear, and dignity has replaced humiliation and oppression.

The wave of freedom and democratic reform has been spreading throughout Central and Eastern Europe, extending from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea and into the Caucasus. One country after another, with the sad exception of Belarus, has been making a commitment to democracy and has accepted the need for the rule of law and the respect of human rights.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, distinguished Members of Congress, it is an honor and a pleasure to be addressing you as the elected Representatives of a great country, a mighty world power that has achieved its greatness by building its house on the solid rock of democracy. The United States of America has remained ever faithful to Lincoln's goal of having a government of the people, for the people and by the people.

Born 230 years ago, your great Nation has grown strong by being a warm and welcoming Mother of Exiles as well as a land of hope and opportunity for its own sons and daughters. Among the exiles received in America, there were many Latvians who had fled their native land at the end of the Second World War.

Latvia remains grateful to the United States for opening its doors to a good many of these exiles, who gained the right to live here in peace, justice and liberty, while many of their relatives back home suffered oppression and brutal persecutions. They quickly became loyal and patriotic citizens of America, productive members of your society, many achieving positions of distinction and responsibility.

Latvia remains grateful to the United States for the firm refusal to recognize the illegal occupation of the three Baltic countries. Along with the other formerly captive nations of Central and Eastern Europe, we thank America for its steadfast and courageous stand on freedom and democracy.

You were instrumental in assisting Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania in the withdrawal of former Soviet troops from their territories. The U.S.-Baltic Charter of Partnership of 1998 gave di-

rection to our common goal and vision of the Baltic States joining Euro-Atlantic institutions. We recall the unanimous vote by the United States Senate in support of the latest enlargement of NATO. Since then, the United States has helped to ensure the collective defense of the Baltic airspace. For all this, we are grateful.

Latvia has had the honor of receiving two American Presidents since recovering its independence: President Clinton in 1994 and President Bush last year. We look forward to receiving President Bush again this fall when the 2006 NATO Summit convenes in Riga. We count ourselves fortunate to have the United States of America as a true friend and trusted ally.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, distinguished Members of Congress, I stand before you as a former exile, who has had the rare privilege of returning to her native land, free and independent again; a former exile who has had the deep satisfaction of helping her country rise like a phoenix from the ashes of oppression. I am the representative of a resilient and stubborn nation whose people have struggled against all odds to preserve their ancient heritage, maintain their language alive, and remain true to their national identity. It has been indeed a privilege to lead this nation while it recovered its rightful place among the world community of free and democratic countries.

The road has not been easy. Renewing independence was just the first step. We still had to rebuild a country, not just starting from scratch, but only after clearing away the rubble left by the previous system. Just 15 years ago, we had to make the transition from a stagnant, state-planned, command economy to a workable, liberal, free-market economy. It was a formidable challenge. While we were fortunate in regaining our independence without significant bloodshed, our inhabitants did pay a heavy economic and social price for their freedom. They were ready to do so because they understood that this was an investment in a better future.

Overcoming years of constant change, uncertainty and adaptation, Latvia has become a success story. An unfinished story by all means, especially as concerns the standard of living of our people, but a success story nevertheless. Last year, Latvia's economy grew by more than 10 percent, and this year my country continues to maintain the highest economic growth rate on the European continent. We are on our way, ready to share our experience and pass it on to others.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, distinguished Members of Congress, what has helped Latvia and its Baltic neighbors succeed where so many others are failing, in spite of not just years, but decades of help and encouragement of every kind?

It was above all the faith of the Baltic nations in the values of freedom and democracy. It was their firm and